

ERIE-NIAGARA REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP

275 OAK ST. SUITE 150
BUFFALO, NEW YORK 14203
PHONE: 716-856-6525 x121 FAX: 856-6754
E-MAIL: tkniazuk@ecidany.com
www.erie.gov/enrp

Co-Chairs:

Hon. Clyde Burmaster
Hon. Barry Weinstein, MD

Minutes of Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership Meeting March 31, 2006

Members:

James Allen
Hon. Vince Anello
Tim Doolittle
Hon. Wright Ellis
Matthew Enstice
Samuel Ferraro
Richard Geiger
Hon. Timothy Kennedy
Hon. Kathy Konst
Celeste Lawson
Maria Lehman
Gregory Lewis
Hon. Peter McMahon
Hal Morse
Jo Nasoff-Finton
Hon. Sean O'Connor
Dr. Gary Praetzel
Melinda Rath Sanderson
David Rosenwasser
Hon. William Ross
Diane Ruzala
Laura St. Pierre
Christopher Schoepflin
Hon. Demone Smith
Hector Titus
Timothy Wanamaker
Peter Wendel

Present: Burmaster, Weinstein, Allen, Doolittle, Ellis, Ferraro, Geiger (proxy), Konst, Lawson, Lewis, Morse, Nasoff-Finton, Praetzel, Rath Sanderson, Ross, Ruzala, St. Pierre, Titus, Wanamaker, Wendel

Excused: Anello, Kennedy, McMahon, Rosenwasser

Absent: Enstice, Lehman, O'Connor, Schoepflin, Smith, Casale, Witul

The meeting was called to order at 8:30 a.m. by Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership Co-Chairs Clyde Burmaster and Barry Weinstein, MD. ENRP Member Jo Nasoff-Finton and the Erie County Industrial Development Agency (ECIDA) were thanked for hosting the meeting.

Minutes of the January, 2006 meeting were approved.

New member Erie County Legislature 5th District Representative Kathy Konst was welcomed. Departing member F. Tim Reese was thanked for his service to the group.

Ad Hoc:

Michael Casale
Lawrence Witul

Administrator:

Tod A. Kniazuk

Subcommittee Chair Hector Titus presented the Economic Development Subcommittee report. The report was received and filed, with approval granted for a presentation on uniform certification for minority business procurement to be given at the June 2 general meeting. ENRP Member Tim Doolittle volunteered to be a part of the procurement project. On a related topic, ENRP Member Melinda Rath Sanderson announced that the Small Business Association is holding a small business day on May 10, including "matchmaking" for certified MBE/WBE businesses. The event, to be held at the Convention Center, will also include the Small Business Award luncheon.

Discussion was held on the Niagara Falls International Airport (NFIA). Specifically, it was questioned why the Buffalo Niagara Partnership (BNP) would support some aspects of the development, but not the development of the airport terminal. The BNP's position

was clarified; that is, the BNP has been and continues to be supportive of cargo being developed at the NFIA in a complimentary way to the Buffalo Niagara International Airport. Also, the specific items relating to the NFIA that were included in the BNP's agenda were requested by Niagara County. Discussion also turned to the University at Buffalo Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth (ILGRG), and the group requested that membership be offered to the Institute through its director, Kathryn Foster.

Subcommittee Member Wright Ellis presented the Government Affairs Subcommittee report. The report was received and filed, with approval granted for the development of an ENRP newsletter. The subcommittee request for approval regarding the Regional Economic Development Strategy was tabled following an update from ENRP Members James Allen and Laura St. Pierre, who met with ILGRG Director Kathryn Foster on the matter. Foster advised them that the Institute does not have enough remaining funding to synthesize the draft REDS context, clusters, ECIDA cluster work, Cornell University and Brookings Institute pieces into one report.

Instead, Foster proposed that a forum be held to present the aforementioned, and ask those in attendance for direction for the project. Allen agreed that this was a good direction. St. Pierre and Doolittle noted that they may be able to find funding for this, as may the ECIDA. ENRP Member Samuel Ferraro added that the Niagara County Center for Economic Development will also "participate." Co-Chair Weinstein replied by noting the history of the REDS project, which commenced in December, 2002. The first year – 2003 – went fine, but in 2004 funding was withdrawn. Allen and then-director of the Institute John Sheffer advanced the project anyway despite "interference from others."

Weinstein asserted that "we need a strategy, not another forum" unless that forum leads to the strategy being produced. Therefore, Weinstein requested that a meeting be held involving himself, Foster, Allen, St. Pierre, Doolittle, Ferraro, and ENRP Administrator Tod Kniazuk to determine a timeline, leadership, and commitment for the completion and implementation of the REDS.

Ferraro also noted that yet to be resolved is the relationship between the REDS and the Framework for Regional Growth, as both documents reference each other. Therefore, issues of content and timing of their release need to be addressed. ENRP Member Timothy Wanamaker requested a copy of the REDS and its

precursor, the Economic Development Working Group report. He said that a meeting with City of Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown on this might be a good idea, but that first we should hold a meeting with himself and Buffalo Economic Development, Permits and Inspections Commissioner Richard Tobe.

Kniazuk presented the Tourism & Culture Subcommittee report. The report was received and filed, with approval granted for ENRP to partner with the Arts Council in Buffalo & Erie County, AmeriCorps, and Americans for the Arts to staff and direct Erie and Niagara County participation in the "Arts & Economic Prosperity II" project. The project will determine the economic impact of the two counties' arts organizations and their audiences through surveying to be conducted over the next several months. That data will be analyzed by professional economists and included in a national report alongside over 100 other communities (we'll also get the raw data back for our own use). The report will be released in June, 2007. The first step, already completed, was to compile a database of the organizations – over 175 in all. ENRP Member Dr. Gary Praetzel added that Niagara University has a grant pending for implementation of the Buffalo-Niagara Cultural Tourism Initiative which could dovetail with this project.

Subcommittee Chair Peter Wendel presented the Transportation Subcommittee report. The report was received and filed, with approval granted for the Niagara River Greenway Commission to be the keynote speaker at the June 2 general meeting.

Wanamaker presented the Small Business 311 concept to the group. Mayor Byron Brown has developed three components to revitalize the economy within Buffalo's neighborhoods: small business districts; neighborhood development around those districts; and workforce development connected to small business. The 311 concept could tie these together, and could also tie in to the ENRP small business assistance website.

Already, Buffalo has small business centers and has a revamped website with all the information available at the centers. Many, however, do not use computers and therefore need an alternate way to get this information. Buffalo currently has a telephone complaint line that will be connected to CitiStat, and the thought is that this line could be expanded to take calls regarding small business creation and development.

There is a cost to implement this; Buffalo approached both the state and federal government for assistance, and may be receiving funds from the state. The result will be a single point of entry for small businesses in Buffalo. The challenge then is whether this same system can be created for the region. Following the presentation, the co-chairs directed that the concept be further explored in the Economic Development Subcommittee.

Sanderson presented ENRP's first member organization update, on the Canisius College Women's Business Center. The Center's mission is to help women realize their greatest potential, and is a partnership between Canisius College and the federal government. It is also a unique model as it is the only one of the one hundred such programs to be a partnership with an institution of higher learning the caliber of Canisius. It is funded by a \$1.3 million grant; the federal government is providing \$150,000 per year for five years. The remainder needs to be raised, as Canisius provides no funding. The Center opened in January, 2004 and is currently in the third year of the grant. They have two full time staff members.

The Center has 5,400 program participants and 1,400 unique visitors. It is governed by a 42 member Board of Directors, some of whom are men – the Center “does not discriminate” against men. Their programs can be summed up as “training-counseling-coaching-networking.” Extensive training and classes are offered to both entrepreneurs and those already in business. Free counseling sessions are held every Wednesday from noon to 1 p.m. The Center partners with SCORE to provide group and one-on-one counseling.

Sanderson noted that there are many places small businesses can go for early stage help, but that the Center fills a need by offering a “continuum of care” to both start and grow a business.

Ferraro presented an update on power relicensing, <http://niagara.nypa.gov> The process is moving forward. The greenway, low cost power, and the waterfront are related issues that are currently attracting attention.

Ferraro presented an update on the Framework for Regional Growth, www.regionalframework.com The final draft is being presented to the steering committee, which will be meeting in the next few weeks.

The Regional Economic Development Strategy (REDS) update was included in the Government Affairs Subcommittee report.

Kniazuk presented the sustainability update. To date, eight organizations and one individual have paid their 2006 membership fees (two of these have been in-kind contributions). This includes the contract with the Arts Council for project work on the Arts & Economic Prosperity project, and provides another possibility for fundraising – that of contract work. Twelve hours of the forty per pay period are being deferred through the Arts Council contract. We began the period of January 30-March 31, 2006 with a zero balance and ended with a balance of \$1,230.56. A sustainability committee has been formed consisting of ENRP Members Allen, Lewis, McMahon, Nasoff-Finton, Rath Sanderson, St. Pierre, Titus, and Weinstein. We have state funding requests under consideration for both general operating and the small business assistance website.

There was no old business. Under new business, Lawson informed the group of an opportunity for cultural organizations to get reduced-priced advertising on NFTA bus wraps. The program was referred to the Tourism & Culture Subcommittee for further discussion.

The next general meeting date was set for Friday, June 2 at 8:30 a.m. at the Niagara County Center for Economic Development (thanks to ENRP Member Samuel Ferraro). The Co-Chairs thanked the group, and the meeting was adjourned at 10:05 a.m.

Submitted by Tod A. Kniazuk
May 25, 2006